

MESSAGE TO OUR PARISHIONERS

Dear Parishioners,

As you are aware, as of 29th June last, the Northern Ireland Executive introduced relaxation of regulations which permitted parishes to re-open churches for public worship. In response to the announced relaxation of regulations the Diocese of Down and Connor issued guidelines for parishes in preparation for 'reopening,' focussing on many strands and practicalities that had to be put in place prior to welcoming parishioners back to the various forms of collective public worship.

The Diocesan guidelines highlight a number of points for your consideration:

- It is essential that parishioners follow the public health advice in relation to good hand and respiratory hygiene.
- If a parishioner is displaying symptoms of Covid-19, including high temperature, a new persistent cough, or loss/change in normal sense of smell or taste, he/she **MUST** stay at home.
- While Churches are open for public celebrations, you are reminded that the obligation to attend Mass on Sunday and Holy Days remains suspended. That will remain the case for the foreseeable future.
- Parishioners who can, should be encouraged to attend on other days of the week, and at this time, be discouraged from attending Mass more than once a week to allow for others to attend.
- There should be no increase in the number of scheduled Masses, particularly on a Sunday.
- Those who are categorised as 'vulnerable' by reason of health condition or age should consider whether it is appropriate to assemble within an enclosed space.
- In common with other northern Dioceses, a social distancing measure of 2 metres should be observed for the time being.

- Members of the same household are permitted to sit together without the need to observe 2 metre distancing.
- Doors and windows should be left open
- Holy Communion should be administered in the hand only. **For those who do not wish to receive Holy Communion in the hand, praying the 'Prayer of Spiritual Communion' may be preferable.**
- As it is not possible to keep 2 metres distance at Communion time, face coverings must be worn by priests, deacons and extraordinary ministers while distributing Holy Communion.

Our Pastoral Community:

The diocesan guidelines acknowledged that each parish/pastoral community could move at a different pace in relation to re-opening.

It was also clear from the diocesan guidelines that it would have been impractical to simply restore the timetable that existed prior to March 23rd as the return to public worship would be gradual and incremental.

In recent weeks, we have offered a limited number of weekday Masses in the parishes of the Derriaghy-Colin Pastoral Community, representing the taking of 'small steps' along the pathway of resumption of public Masses.

Concerning weekend Masses, our proposal is to re-introduce the Sunday morning Masses at first instance, beginning on the first weekend of August, and subsequent to parishioners 'settling' into the timetable, re-introduce the vigil Masses in a few weeks' time.

It is important to move in a gradual, progressive, and safe manner, hence the careful and paced resumption of public Masses within our parishes

Practicalities:

- Please sanitise your hands when entering the church foyer, and when exiting the church
- Stewards will be in attendance to guide you to a pew. They have been trained for the role, and their selection of a pew will be informed by their awareness of the layout of the church. Your cooperation on this matter is requested.
- Each Church will have maximum capacity. There may be times when it is not possible to gain entry to the church. This may be the case particularly at weekends.
- Parishioners are not permitted to stand around the walls inside the church-this is to help preserve the social-distancing required.
- Unfortunately, the church toilets will be closed for reasons of health and safety.
- For the distribution of Holy Communion, stewards will indicate when you can come forward to the sanctuary to receive.
- Please observe the two-metre social distance when processing to Holy Communion, and upon your return journey to your seat.
- For those requiring assistance, e.g. those who are less-able bodied, please inform the stewards when entering the Church; they will indicate special arrangements required to ensure that you can receive Holy Communion.
- At the conclusion of Mass, please follow the direction of the stewards to ensure a safe exit from the church.

We wish to thank those who have volunteered as stewards in our parishes. As you may be aware, a lot of effort is required preparing the church for each Mass, and sanitising it after the celebration. More volunteers are required! If you would like to assume the role of a volunteer steward, please speak to one of the stewards, or alternatively the priest of your particular parish.

We look forward to welcoming you.

The Parish Priests of the Pastoral Community of Derriaghy & Colin